



ESKANDARĪ, ĪRAJ

ESKANDARĪ, ĪRAJ (b. Tehran, 1907, d. Leipzig, 10 Ordibehešt 1372 Š./30 April 1985; [Figure 1](#)), prominent leader of the Tudeh Party (q.v.; see also COMMUNISM ii-iii). Raised in a family that was active in politics and strongly supported constitutional government, he was politicized from an early age. His father, Mīrzā Yaḥyā, a leading progressive deputy in the first Majles, died while Īraj was still a child, and his uncle, the social democrat Solaymān Mīrzā Eskandarī (q.v.), and grandfather, Moḥsen Mīrzā, took charge of his education (Eskandarī, 1987-89, IV, pp. 109-29). Eskandarī attended Dār al-fonūn during World War I and then the Faculty of Political Science (Madrasa-ye ‘olūm-e sīāsī, qq.v.). Like most progressive Persians in the early 1920s he expected the October Revolution in Russia to put an end to both tsarist encroachments upon Persian territory and British intervention in her internal affairs. In this period, he was witness to the final stages of the Jangalī revolutionary movement, the ephemeral Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran, and the 1921 coup d’état which brought the founder of the Pahlavi dynasty into prominence (see Chaqueri, 1995).

In 1925 Eskandarī went to study law in Paris; in 1927 he transferred to the university at Grenoble, where he received his law degree in 1930. In Paris he had come under the influence of a Bulgarian communist student. In early 1928 he served as interpreter for Solaymān Mīrzā at a meeting with the French communist leader Marcel Cachin in Paris. His uncle also put him in contact with the Persian communist Mortaḏā ‘Alawī (Eskandarī, 1987-89, I, p. 11; idem, 1989, pp. 76-80; Chaqueri, 1969-94, IX, pp. 93-98), who directed an effective



student movement from Berlin. Two Soviet officials reported in 1941 and 1944 that Eskandarī knew German and was a member of both the German and French communist parties, though the information cannot be confirmed. Eskandarī himself alluded only to participation in French party cells (Eskandarī, 1986, p. 248; Chaqueri, forthcoming, chap. 13).

Back in Tehran in 1931 he worked as a magistrate (*mo'āwen-e dādsetān*) in the newly created Ministry of Justice (Wezārat-e 'adālat). Two years later he met Taqī Arānī (q.v.), who had also been introduced to Marxism by 'Alawī in Berlin. Under Arānī and in collaboration with 'Alawī's brother, Bozorg 'Alawī, Eskandarī helped publish *Donyā* (q.v.; February 1933-June 1935), a Marxist review independent of Moscow and the Comintern. The Arānī group was infiltrated by 'Abd-al-Ṣamad Kāmbaḳš, later an influential Tudeh party leader widely known in Persia for his close connections with the Soviet intelligence service (OGPU /NKVD/KGB; Chaqueri, 1969-94, XV, intro.). Kāmbaḳš and his associate Moḥammad Šūrešīan betrayed the group to the Persian police, and its members were arrested in May 1937 (Chaqueri, forthcoming, chap. 13; cf. Farzāna, pp. 371-89). In a secret letter to the Soviets, Kāmbaḳš accused Eskandarī of having shown weakness by “confessing” to the police what he knew—an accusation that is not borne out by historical evidence. In spite of his alleged “vanity” and time-serving attitude, Eskandarī was characterized by Kāmbaḳš to the Soviets as “capable, clever, and trustworthy.” On the other hand, the Soviet “expert” Plishevskii described him as “disapproving of the communist struggle against Trotskyism,” “disinclined toward ministerial positions,” “hesitate,” and “needing constant watching” (Chaqueri, forthcoming, chap. 13; Farzāna, pp. 371-89).

At the trial in November 1938 Eskandarī received a five-year sentence. He was one of the first to be released after the forced abdication of Reżā Shah in September 1941, and he and several associates immediately established the pro-Soviet Tudeh party (Eskandarī, 1949, p. 9). He headed the editorial board of the antifascist daily *Mardom*, published jointly with Moṣṭafā Fāteḥ, an employee of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (q.v.). Subsequently Eskandarī also served as editor-in-chief of the party organ *Rahbar*. During World War II he was deputy to the Fifteenth Majles from Sārī in Māzandarān, which was under Soviet occupation. In the Majles he voiced Tudeh support for Soviet demands to exploit the oil in northern Persia, a position he was later to regret as the first serious mistake of the party (Eskandarī, 1358 Š./1979; idem, interview; idem, 1986, pp. 105-6; idem, 1987-89, II, pp. 118-20). In 1945 he



headed a delegation from the Tudeh-controlled Šūra-ye mottaḥeda-ye markazī-e kārgarān wa zaḥmatkešān (United Central Council of Workers and Laborers) to the conference of the International Labour Organization in Geneva (Chaqueri, 1978-91, II, pp. 38-42).

Eskandarī was an architect of the coalition of the Tudeh party with prime minister Aḥmad Qawām (Qawām-al-Saltāna) in 1946 and served as minister of trade, crafts, and arts (Wezārat-e bāzārgānī wa pīša wa honar). He was dropped from the cabinet at the end of that year, some months after the coalition collapsed (Eskandarī, 1951, p. 12; idem, 1987-89, II, pp. 122 ff.) in the aftermath of the demise of the Soviet-supported Autonomous Government of Azarbaijan. He went to France, where he completed a doctorate in political economy and worked for the pro-Soviet World Peace Movement, representing the Tudeh party at its Paris conference in 1949. He was also associated with the French scholar Maxime Rodinson on the editorial board of the communist publication *Moyen Orient*. During the second Tudeh party congress in the spring of 1948 he was reelected to the central committee in absentia. He was also condemned to death in absentia by the government after an alleged Tudeh attempt on the life of the shah on 15 Bahman 1328 Š./4 February 1949.

Between 1948 and 1979 Eskandarī worked for the Tudeh party in Paris (until he was expelled in 1951), Vienna, Budapest, Moscow, and finally Leipzig (Eskandarī, 1986, pp. 136-38; idem, 1987-89, III, pp. 46-51; Chaqueri, 1988, pp. 107-8; idem, 1969-94, I, 2nd ed., pp. 359-84). In December 1969 he replaced Rezā Rādmaneš as first secretary of the party (Ḥezb-e Tūda, pp. 572-73, 580-83; *Kayhān*, 22-24 December 1970; Mo'menī, p. 171; Ṭabarī, pp. 188-89, 254-59).

Eskandarī's lukewarm attitude toward the Islamic Revolution and refusal of a Soviet offer to help turn Persia into another Afghanistan cost him his leadership position; he was removed on 14 January 1979 and replaced by Nūr-al-Dīn Kīānūrī (Chaqueri, 1988, pp. 113-15). In an interview during his visit to Persia after the fall of the monarchy he openly expressed his discontent with party support for the Islamic revolution (Eskandarī, interview). Under pressure from Kīānūrī, however, he retracted his statements and left for a second "exile," ordered by his own party. As Kīānūrī's support for the Islamic regime grew, Eskandarī wrote, in the autumn of 1981, to the Soviet Communist party, denouncing Tudeh policies (Eskandarī, 1988). After the arrest of Tudeh leaders in February 1983 and the dismantling of its organization inside the country, Eskandarī strove unsuccessfully to prevent the party from disintegrating into feuding factions (Chaqueri, 1988, pp. 116-18). Back in



Europe he obtained from the more sympathetic French socialist government an annulment of the 1951 expulsion order, but before he could move to France he died of cancer. With his death, the slow process of dissolution in the Tūda party gathered momentum and it finally split into irreconcilable factions.

In addition to his political activities, Eskandarī translated the three volumes of Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* into Persian and wrote a study of ancient Persian history (*Dar tārikī*).

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